


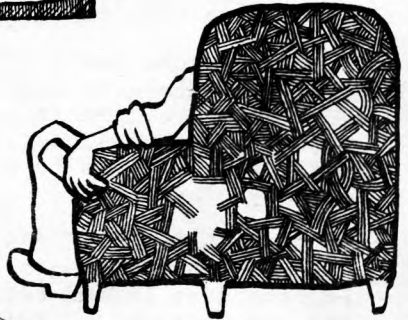
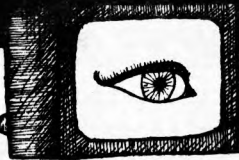
JOYCE



CABLE

How Portland Can Have

COMMUNITY TELEVISION



text
& graphics

David McMahon

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CITIZENS FOR CABLE TELEVISION

Broadcast TV and Community Programming

Television brings us fantastic pictures of men on the moon, but it doesn't give us a very clear picture of our own neighborhood. There is great value in what television brings to us from distant places. But, doesn't it seem odd that we often hear more about events in Vietnam or Belfast than we hear about what's happening in our own community?

Television has a tremendous power to influence our thinking, but most of us have virtually no say about how TV is used or controlled. Many people, for many good reasons, are not satisfied with television as it is today. But now, TV IS CHANGING.

Cable television will be a very different kind of television. TV will no longer be a passive, primarily entertainment medium. The cable will make television a method of local and personal communication. Using the cable, we can all participate in making TV relevant, valuable, and enjoyable.

The owners and managers of broadcast television have always declared that they "give the people what they want." The broadcaster makes his money by "selling" his viewers to advertisers, however, so his idea of the "best" program is one that everyone can understand, one that will offend no one, and one that everyone will "settle for." Most often, the result is bland programming aimed at the "lowest common denominator" of mass interests and tastes. Specific interests and controversial issues are rarely fully developed on broadcast TV.

In addition, there are few relevant community programs on TV today because the vast majority of programs are produced for the entire nation by the TV networks or by other national producers. Local productions are often little more than token fulfillment of FCC rules.

If everyone could afford to buy TV airtime, more ideas and interests would be seen. But, TV airtime is very expensive. It is expensive because the equipment for producing and broadcasting television programs is very costly. TV airtime is also expensive because there is a scarcity of channels.

There are only a few channels that can be used for broadcasting TV signals. If more than 6 VHF channels are broadcast in one region, the signals will interfere with one another and ruin reception. Because of this interference problem, TV stations have had to serve large areas and diverse communities, as far as 100 miles from the transmitter. (UHF can provide additional channels, but requires equally expensive equipment. Also, because of poor quality UHF tuners in most TV sets, UHF reception is generally of poorer quality than VHF.)



As a consequence of high production costs and channel scarcity, generally, only big companies, politicians with wealthy supporters, and large organizations can afford the cost of putting their messages on TV.

Reporters and TV cameramen flock to the scene of exciting "news" events, like an important labor strike, or a demonstration. They may cover special events like the opening of a new community health center, or tragedies such as a fire, or an industrial accident. But the background to these events--the long organizing efforts to build an anti-highway group, the year-long attempts to obtain a health facility, to have fire escapes constructed, or the negotiations to improve working conditions--these less spectacular, but important, stories are often not considered newsworthy enough to make the six-o'clock news.



The need for extensive, in-depth, and sympathetic coverage of community affairs and local issues remains unmet.



Organizing, door-knocking, and holding meetings are necessary means of building a strong community organization; but effective use of the media can go a long way to help.

Likewise, there are many local cultural and artistic events that could be a rich and relevant source of TV programming. But, seldom do these community resources find a place on broadcast TV.

Broadcast TV has given us knowledge and understanding of distant people, places, and international affairs. Now, with the coming of cable television, TV can serve to improve our understanding and knowledge of our own communities.

What is Cable TV ?

Cable television was originally designed to improve reception where broadcast signals were distorted by hills or weakened by distance. Since the people who lived in these areas were unable to get television otherwise, they were gladly willing to pay a monthly subscription fee (usually \$5 to \$8) in order to have good reception. A local businessman (often the TV repairman) constructed a large antenna on a hill or mountain, pulled the broadcast signals out of the air, amplified them, and sent them to the homes of his subscribers through a coaxial cable. This pencil-thin cable provides flawless transmission of TV and radio signals into more than 100 Oregon communities. These systems are generally called "community antenna", or CATV systems.

Over the past several years, many big cities have also been "wired" with the coaxial cable, mainly because the cable can carry a great many more TV channels than regular broadcasting can supply. With current technology, a single cable can carry about 30 TV channels, and in the future could carry close to 50. Any number of cables could be laid, so technically there is no limit to the

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number of channels that a cable system could provide. Furthermore, a single cable can transmit signals in both directions at the same time. This two-way television will greatly change the ways we use TV.

Urban cable television can do much more than the original CATV systems. If cable systems are well planned, they will become a very sophisticated communications network, linking office to office, home to place of business, neighborhood to neighborhood, and city to city, around the world via satellite.

By using a key-punch device on your home TV set, you will be able to select your own TV programs from a vast selection of pre-recorded tapes.

You could use a computer to help you figure out your income tax.

When you write a check, money could be transferred automatically from one account to another.

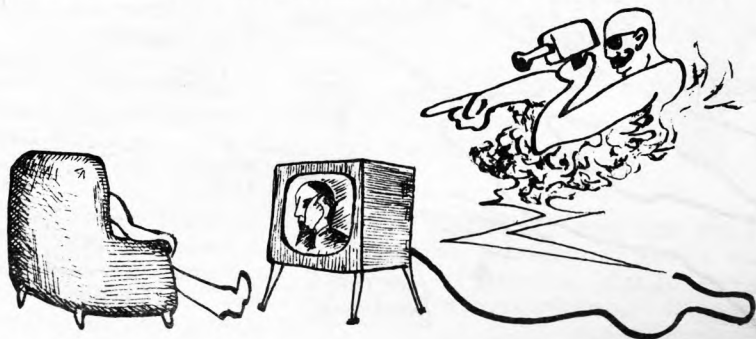
You could do much of your shopping by television.

With the addition of a photostatic device to your "home communications terminal," you could have momentary transmission to your home of any publication you wanted.

Big Brother?

Cable television also presents dangerous possibilities that must be squarely faced. Questions concerning information control and individual privacy are very important. With a nationwide cable network, linking local and national "information banks," all types of information will be rapidly available to government and police agencies and to your creditors. Practically everything you do can be monitored by someone. Not only will credit information, police and driving records, and employment histories be recorded by the computers, but, information never before compiled on you could become a matter of public information.

Many thoughtful people are very concerned that certain kinds of surveillance now being considered by police and fire departments and other agencies (even central burglar alarm systems and utility meter-reading) could open the door for the scheduled 1984 appearance of "Big Brother." For these reasons, the development of cable television must be carefully watched and controlled by citizens.



Portland's Cable System

Construction of Portland's cable television system will probably begin sometime in 1974, be in operation within two years, and be completed by 1978. The Federal Communications Commission requires that Portland's system have a minimum of 20 channels, but it is more likely to have a capacity of 40-60 channels. Some of these will be used to:

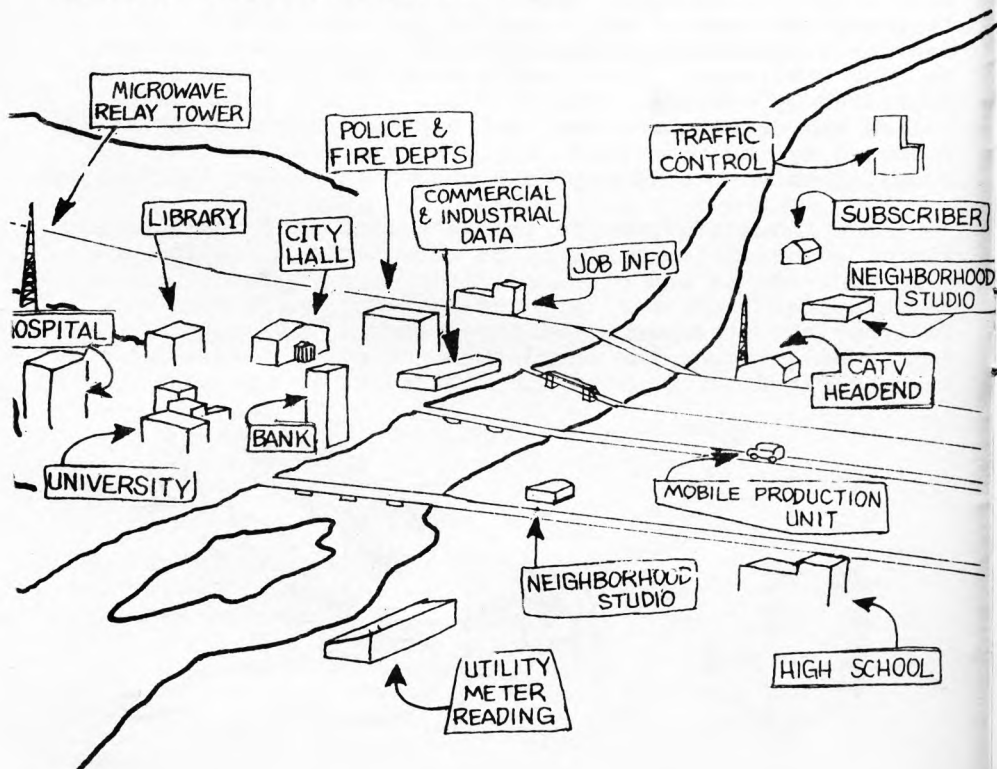
Rebroadcast...all local TV stations

Import.....several distant TV stations, say from Seattle, San Francisco, or Vancouver, B.C.

Cablecast.....programs and services made locally or purchased from national producers.

In addition, the FCC requires that Portland's system provide at least one channel each, for local government use, local education uses, and public access. The FCC further requires that the system be capable of transmitting signals in both directions along the cable.

After all of the above cable uses are met, additional channels, or channel time, would be available for lease to companies, banks, schools, governments, or to individuals, for additional programming, or private, "common-carrier" type communication uses.



Cable programming will be different

Cable operators expect that people will pay a monthly subscription fee to get these additional TV services. Since subscription fees will cover most operating costs of the cable system, cable TV need not rely as heavily on advertising for its income. Cable television, therefore, will not have to cater to the "mass audience" that advertisers demand.



With so many channels to program, it is good business for the cable operator to present programs that appeal strongly to the particular tastes and interests of small groups of people. Individuals will subscribe to cable for many different reasons: Some will want first-run movies, some will want distant stations, some will want community programs and services. By offering something special to everyone, the cable operator can attract enough subscribers to support the cable system.

It is likely that some program producers will lease channels from the cable operator. Subscribers will pay an additional fee for each program they watch on such a "pay channel", just as one would pay to see a movie at the theater or subscribe to a magazine. This direct payment enables producers to present programs without commercials and without the threat of censorship by advertisers.

Half-inch Video

Unlike broadcast television, cable TV can transmit signals from 1/2"-wide videotapes, made on portable videotape recorders. These 1/2-inch units, consisting of a camera (with a built-in microphone) and a recorder, are about as simple to operate as a regular sound tape recorder, and may be carried almost anywhere. Because the units are relatively inexpensive (about \$1,600) they should be readily available for anyone to borrow, or rent at reasonable rates. Furthermore, enough 1/2-inch videotape for a half-hour production, costs under \$15, and the tape can be erased and used over and over again.



Both the increased channel capacity and the availability of inexpensive 1/2-inch video equipment means that there can be programs produced by anyone. Cable television makes possible a new kind of TV programming. Cable television can bring us...



Comm

"Community Television" is locally produced programming, made to suit local interests and needs. There are many suggestions for possible community programs:

information services; local entertainment, culture, and special events; in-depth local news and documentaries; citizens' soapbox; public meetings and debates; classes from local schools....



Cable could carry programs of special relevance to such diverse groups as

the black community, senior citizens, political parties, pre-school children, women's groups, businessmen, doctors, deaf people, environmentalists, neighborhood groups....

Information services will be a valuable part of "Community Television." City agencies could explain their programs and how to use them. Community groups could do the same. Cable might carry a calendar of community affairs, events, and entertainment. Cable could carry information about

best buys, consumer protection, hygiene, available rental housing, child care programs, bus schedules...

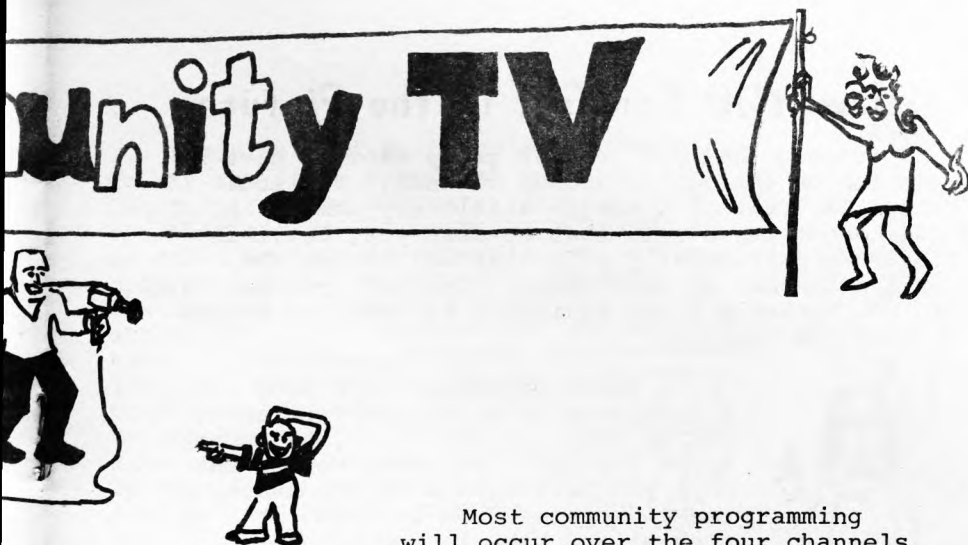
job opportunities and training, unemployment benefits, welfare eligibility, social security, food stamps...

stock market reports, wholesale inventories, neighborhood advertising....

In addition, cable TV would be a good outlet for the work of local artists, musicians, and theater groups.



These are just a few possibilities. The best ideas will come from you. Every community group should give some thought about how cable TV might help meet some of its communication needs.



Most community programming will occur over the four channels dedicated exclusively for "local origination."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHANNEL. This channel might be used to cablecast public meetings, information on government services, free airtime for all candidates for political office, etc. Local governments will be responsible for producing programs for this channel.

EDUCATIONAL CHANNEL. City schools and local colleges will produce programs for this channel. Some programs would be made for in-school use, and others would be designed for general community education. Series on consumer education, legal problems, or environmental education are possible examples of general education programs on this channel.

PUBLIC ACCESS CHANNEL. Community groups could solicit members or funds. Since the cable operator must provide five minutes of free time to anyone, on a first-come-first-served basis, a citizen's soapbox, or a TV version of the radio talk-show, is likely. This channel could also be used to present a variety of non-studio, community-produced programs.

LOCAL ORIGATION CHANNEL. In addition to the above channels, the FCC requires that the cable operator, himself, must produce or, at least, originate programs over one channel. Currently, local origination channels carry such programming as local news, time and weather reports, stock market reports, or other items which do not require much production. In the future, however, the cable operator's channel will probably rival broadcast TV for complexity of programming.



How YOU Can Get in the Picture

Suppose that you or your group want to have a program on the public access channel. You could stand in front of a single stationary camera and talk about the events that concern you; but, this is not a particularly effective way to use the full potential of television. Instead, you may wish to use portable video equipment to tape the actual events "on location."



A cable operator could send out a cameraman to do a videotape about you or your project. But, he cannot speak for you. In other words, the more you participate in the making of the videotape--from deciding what to present and how, to the recording itself and the final editing--the more the program will say what you want it to say.

For this sort of community programming to work, there must be equipment available to interested citizens. There must also be someone to show them how to use it and to give assistance and advice, if it is needed. Furthermore, this equipment and technical assistance must be available and reasonably convenient to people in all areas of the city. Perhaps there should be "neighborhood production and training centers" to develop wide citizen participation in "Community Television."

Production costs for a half-hour videotape could range from next-to-nothing (with volunteer production people), to several thousand dollars (using professionals). Some groups will need help with costs if they are to make the kind of productions that suit their purposes. "Neighborhood production and training centers" or community productions might be financed in part by subscription fees, by local advertising, or by donations and grants.



"Community Television" can serve the special interests of everyone, but it is especially important that the people and groups which have traditionally been excluded from the media will be guaranteed the opportunity to use cable television to present their stories and opinions. Although we all have the constitutional right to freedom of speech, without access to the media, we have little chance of being heard.

The people of Portland and Multnomah County are in an excellent position to benefit from the successes and failures of other cities, in both the development of cable systems, in general, and local programming, in particular. We must realize that, across the nation, public access and local origination "cablecasting" have met with more failures than successes. These failures may be caused by inadequate provision of funds, facilities, or staff, or because the procedures to obtain access have unintentionally discouraged people from making good use of the services and facilities that are provided. But, all too often, these failures are caused by apathy and ignorance on the part of the potential users in the community.



In order for "Community Television" to become a reality in the Portland area, several questions need to be answered:

What kind of an organization should own and/or operate our cable system: A large national corporation? A local enterprise? A community, non-profit organization? The city?

Will people of the community have any say in how local production facilities are managed and funded?

How would different types of ownership or control effect the quality and cost of services?

Should there be neighborhood production facilities?

How many channels will be needed for public uses?

Will those who cannot afford the nominal production costs be able to use facilities free of charge?

Will low-income people be able to afford cable TV's monthly subscription fees and what should be done if they cannot?



The Cable Franchise

Local governments in Oregon have the power to grant a franchise to a profit-making company, to a non-profit community corporation, or to establish a publicly owned system. This franchise is a contract which gives the cable operator the right to lay the cable, solicit subscribers, and begin to transmit programs.

In addition to simply deciding upon the best form of ownership, the local city councils and county commissions also have the power to demand that certain conditions are met by the prospective cable operator. In other words, local governments will determine what features their cable systems should have to best serve the public interest.



Because few people are aware of cable TV's potentials--or its difficulties and dangers--city councils in other cities have rarely heard from the community when they conduct studies or hold their public hearings on ordinances and franchises. As a result, across the country, citizens have had very little to say in how their cable systems are controlled and operated.

This lack of knowledge is not surprising. Urban cable TV is such a new thing that no one really knows all of its potentials or how it can best be organized to serve and protect the public interest. One thing is certain, however: cable TV will have a profound effect on our social habits and on the structure of our society.



The city of Portland and Multnomah County have wisely decided to undertake a full, public study of cable television. Under the supervision of Portland's Commissioner of Public Utilities, Connie McCready, and County Commissioner, Ben Padrow, a City-County Cable TV Study Committee has been appointed. This 16-member citizens' committee is studying the practical possibilities of cable TV and is trying to assess public needs and wishes in order to see that a good cable franchise is prepared. The Study Committee needs the contributions and participation of other citizens if its recommendations are to be truly representative of community needs for cable TV.

In cooperation with Citizens for Cable Television, the City-County Cable TV Study Committee is conducting a public information campaign. Speakers from the two groups are available to acquaint community groups with the problems and possibilities of cable TV and to assist citizens and groups in preparing proposals for possible programs. The public is encouraged to attend meetings of the Study Committee and to express their needs for access to cable TV. For further information about meeting and hearing schedules, call either City Hall (248-4128) or Citizens for Cable Television (232-0825).



There's still time
to guarantee that

COMMUNITY TELEVISION really comes to Portland

Cable television is a revolution in electronic communications. It will have a powerful impact on our lives. The opportunity for community participation in television is one of the many great benefits that it will bring us. On the other hand, it could also be used as a tool for dangerous invasions of privacy.

Decisions being made now will determine the future of cable television in Portland and Multnomah County.

There is still time for you to influence these decisions.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

Will cable television truly serve the public interest?
It's up to you.



The author would like to thank Ed Lyle (for his long hours of production and editorial assistance) and the Boston Media Project and the National Film Board of Canada (whose earlier publications inspired this one.)

CITIZENS FOR CABLE TELEVISION



Office: 3279 SE Hawthorne Blvd. Phone: 232-0825

Citizens for Cable Television is an independent, non-profit community organization. In order to insure that cable TV serves the public interest, CCTV encourages wide citizen participation and involvement in all phases of the decision-making process which will determine cable TV's future in Oregon.

If you are interested in any aspect of cable TV, contact Citizens for Cable Television. We probably will not be able to answer all of your questions or meet every request for assistance, but we will try.

*** If you want to learn more about cable TV...

CCTV can arrange for a speaker to visit your group, or since CCTV maintains a large resource library, we could suggest specific books, pamphlets, or technical journals for you to read.

*** If you want to learn how to use portable videotape equipment...

CCTV will continue to coordinate regular workshops in the use of video equipment.

*** If you want to see special public service programming provided by government or service agencies...

CCTV will represent your needs and desires to the agencies best able to provide such programming.

*** If you want to organize an ongoing community video project...

CCTV can put you in touch with others who share your interests and concerns for community development.

*** If you want to write a grant proposal for special funding...

CCTV can help you identify possible funding sources, can help you prepare a realistic budget, and can provide some assistance in preparing the proposal.

In order to accomplish these goals, CCTV needs your support. Membership in CCTV signifies that you want cable TV to fulfill its potential in meeting the communication needs of everybody--not just those who can afford the costs of TV production.

The yearly \$2 individual membership in CCTV is less than 1/2 of the normal monthly subscription rate to a cable TV system--a small price to pay to insure that you or your group will be able to use cable TV, if and when you need to.

PLEASE JOIN US

CITIZENS FOR CABLE TELEVISION
P.O. Box 1145
Portland, Oregon 97207

_____ I wish to become a member of CCTV. (Dues: \$2 per year, but
_____ contributions above the basic rate are most welcome.)
_____ I would like more information about the activities of CCTV.
_____ I would like a speaker to talk to my group about cable TV.
_____ Please send me information about group memberships in CCTV.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Zipcode: _____

Occupation: _____

Group or Organization: _____

Special interests, expertise, or comments: _____

_____ CCTV may publicly use my name in support of its objectives
signed _____

CITIZENS FOR CABLE TELEVISION

P.O. BOX 1145, PORTLAND, OREGON 97207

